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SUBJECT: November 13 attack on IDP camp near Goma

REF: KINSHASA 142

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

Report below was drafted by pol chief David Brown, currently on TDY in Goma.

1. (SBU) Summary. Thousands of panicked IDPs fled three camps near Goma November 13 after FARDC artillery deployed nearby apparently opened fire. While the FARDC claimed pro-Nkunda CNDP forces had attacked the camps, and Nkunda blamed the FDLR, neither MONUC nor humanitarian organizations were able to confirm the identity of combatants who engaged FARDC forces initially near Kishangashi, six kilometers northwest of the camps. MONUC military officials expressed frustration at the conduct of the FARDC, which had deployed artillery near the camps despite repeated MONUC warnings. Humanitarian organizations estimated almost 20,000 fled the camps, but most had returned by the following day. Information available at this point suggests deficient FARDC leadership and discipline. End summary.

2. (SBU) Initial news reports on November 14 claiming Nkunda forces had attacked IDP camps located on the Goma-Sake road and that the FARDC had engaged in widespread looting of all five camps appear to be incorrect, but reflect the anxiety of the thousands of panicked IDPs who fled three of the camps. If events occurred as Goma TDY officer was told, such reports would also suggest the willingness of the FARDC hierarchy in North Kivu to manipulate partial information, and would attest to the power of the vast network of rumor which continues to prevail in Goma in the absence of any effective communications infrastructure in the province.

3. (SBU) MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander Gen. I. Narayan and the brigade's chief intelligence officer Col. Sandeep Jaswel told Embassy's TDY officer later that day that there had in fact been some fighting in the area of Kishangashi, about six kilometers northwest of the camps in the early morning hours of November 13. The Indian brigade learned of the incident at about 0725, and contacted North Kivu regional FARDC Commander Gen. Vainqueur Mayala, his deputy Col. Delphin Kahimbi and FARDC field commanders.

4. (SBU) At this point, there was no question of any attack on IDP camps. The FARDC commanders said an attack by Nkunda's CNDP forces was in progress in Kishangashi. They said they had sent reinforcements to the area, and had beaten back the attack. MONUC ordered a company of Indian peacekeepers and APCs to Kishangashi, and also contacted Nkunda's spokesman, who denied CNDP forces were involved in any attack.

5. (SBU) Jaswel said that at about 0825 FARDC artillery deployed

between the refugee camps Mugunga 1 and Mugunga 2 on the north side of the Goma-Sake road opened fire, panicking the camps' residents, who fled in the direction of Goma. He said the brigade once again contacted Mayala and Kahimbi as well as Governor Julien Paluku and established joint MONUC-FARDC patrols in the area in a confidence-building measure.

¶6. (SBU) Patrick Lavand'homme of OCHA told TDY officer the camp president of Mugunga 1 reported subsequent exchanges of small-arms fire between the FARDC 15th Integrated Brigade and unknown elements in the surrounding hills, followed by a FARDC order to residents to leave the camp. Lavand'homme said residents of Mugungu 2 told similar stories of FARDC artillery and small-arms fire, but no visit from FARDC troops or order to leave. He said residents of a third camp, Lac Vert, one of three located on the south side of the road, also fled, but returned following on-the-scene appeals during the 1000 hour by Paluku.

¶7. (SBU) Charges and counter-charges continued during the day. Mayala told Reuters 27 had been killed; Kahimbi later denied it. A FARDC spokesman -- likely Kahimbi -- told Agence France Presse that CNDP forces attacked in the area of the camps in order to capture the nearby artillery. A provincial government official told TDY officer he had spoken that morning with Nkunda, who claimed his forces were not involved, and blamed FDLR troops for the attack in retaliation for alleged non-payment of funds promised by Kabila. The same official contacted an FDLR spokesman, who denied Nkunda's claims.

¶8. (SBU) Gen. Narayan expressed frustration at the entire incident. He said he and his commanders had repeatedly warned the FARDC of the dangers of deploying the artillery -- apparently two 105-mm guns -- between the two camps when the artillery arrived there some two

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weeks earlier. He said Kahimbi told him the deployment was for training purposes only. He expressed further skepticism upon learning that ammunition was being stored with the guns.

¶9. (SBU) Jaswal said firing had ceased by early afternoon. He stressed that it was the firing of the artillery that had caused the camp residents to take to the roads. Lavand'homme said there was looting at Mugunga 1 by both FARDC and camp residents, primarily plastic sheeting and food. He said he had heard no reports of looting at Mugunga 2 or any of the three camps -- Bulengo, EP Lac Vert, Buhunba -- located on the south side of the road. In all, he believed almost 20,000 IDPs had fled toward Goma, including all of the Mugungu 1 residents and perhaps three-quarters of those at Mugunga 2. On-site observations by OFDA and NGO representatives indicate most of the camp residents had returned by the following day.

¶10. (SBU) Comment. This incident suggests deficiencies in FARDC leadership and discipline. What appears to have been command determination to deploy artillery turned an isolated skirmish into a potential humanitarian crisis and disordered thousands of lives already in difficulty. Elements of the FARDC's 15th integrated brigade compounded the problem if, as reported, they then looted one of the camps. End comment.

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